



SEATTLE DESIGN COMMISSION

NEWS RELEASE

SUBJECT: Design Commission supports tunnel option for waterfront

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: **FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**
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Seattle Design Commission Supports Tunnel Option

SEATTLE – Today the Seattle Design Commission issued the following letter urging support for the replacement of the Alaskan Way viaduct with a tunnel:

“Tomorrow the Olympic Sculpture Park opens, and the 3.5 million residents of Puget Sound will be able to see works of art framed by the backdrop of Elliott Bay and the Olympic mountains, weather willing. The day marks the birth of this 9 acre open space, and signals the reconnection of this site to the waterfront, accomplished through creative design, clear funding priorities, inter-agency cooperation and strong civic leadership.

The Seattle Design Commission is asking for the same insight and leadership in the decision for the replacement of the Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall. We appreciate the need for action, but not if the political pressure leads to a bad decision. Constructing a new and larger elevated roadway along our precious waterfront would be short-sighted and would damage the vitality of the State's largest city.

Seattle is the economic hub of the Puget Sound Region. Seattle's waterfront is the region's waterfront. When we speak about the future of the waterfront, we are speaking about the future of our region.

We would like to firmly restate with the City's leadership our strong, unwavering support for recapturing the Waterfront. The future of the waterfront, as so brilliantly realized at the Olympic Sculpture Park, requires removal of the Viaduct

The Design Commission has closely followed the Viaduct replacement proposals in regular and ongoing reviews since 2001. That work has been presented jointly by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT).

One of the recommendations of the Expert Review Panel, assembled at the specific request of the State government, was to consider a scaled-down version of the tunnel, a four lane option nicknamed “Tunnel Lite”. For the past few months, both WSDOT and SDOT have been evaluating the implications of this alternative.

This work is not yet complete. SDOT, working with WSDOT, completed the preliminary level of analysis, what is considered a “fatal flaw analysis” which has determined that this tunnel would provide essential transportation services. This Tunnel Lite option reduces the costs of the tunnel from \$4.6 billion to \$3.4 billion, bringing this alternative closer into line with the cost estimates for a proposed overhead structure.

But costs are not the only factor. The Design Commission is asked to compare the urban design merits of the two proposals currently on the table. Replacement of the viaduct with a new elevated structure would perpetuate the separation of downtown Seattle from the central waterfront. With the opening of the Olympic Sculpture Park and with planning by Washington State Ferries underway for major improvements to the Colman Dock by 2016, the City’s central waterfront will have major urban improvements as bookends. The chance to free the waterfront from the visual blight of an elevated structure is one we cannot afford to miss.

This is a rare opportunity for Seattle to remake its waterfront. Bremerton knows. Tacoma knows. Portland knows. It takes great leadership to make a great City. The future of the Puget Sound Region will be judged by the quality of our leaders’ decision-making – at this critical juncture.

We urge the State’s leaders to recognize the potential of the Tunnel Lite scheme, and to complete the analysis before forcing a political decision. Don’t let the pressures force us into a bad decision that will have lasting consequence. The members of the Design Commission pledge our time, energy and expertise to the Region’s leadership in making the right decision.”

The Seattle Design Commission, operating since 1968 is an independent body of Seattle citizens, comprised of 10 members appointed by the Mayor and City Council, who are professional designers from a wide range of disciplines. The Commission’s role is to oversee the design of capital improvement projects and the wise use of the City’s resources. Their charge includes the review of all major transportation projects situated in the City.

Seattle Design Commissioners are: Karen Kiest (Chair), Tasha Atchison, Pam Beyette, Evan Bourquard, Brendan Connolly, John Hoffman, Mary Johnston, Anindita Mitra, Dennis Ryan, and Darrell Vange.

For more on the Commission, see: www.seattle.gov/designcommission

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